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ABSTRACT

The extent to which African American faculty provide support and mentoring to African American students determines the ease of students' transition to predominantly white colleges. This paper examines the role of both white and African American faculty in responding to the needs of African American students. Two ways that white institutions responded to African American students following the civil rights movement was to develop Afrocentric courses and to establish African American social clubs. Currently, African American students need to participate in a wide array of activities within their academic institutions in order to prepare for success beyond college, and they need to learn how to present their view of academic material from Afrocentric and Eurocentric perspectives. African American students require social and academic support in order to make the necessary adjustments to the white campus environment, with African American administrators, faculty, and staff involved in this effort. All members of the African American college community should meet and develop a campus organization that can respond to faculty, staff, and student needs within the organizational structure. This organization can also relate to the city's social and political organizations in which the college resides so that information, support, and expertise can be transmitted back and forth. (SM)

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AFRICAN AMERICAN FACULTY AS PART OF THE PROBLEM OR PART OF THE SOLUTION IN THE RETENTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS ON "WHITE" COLLEGE CAMPUSES

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African American Faculty as Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution in the Retention of African American Students on "White" College Campuses

It is important to examine the role African American faculty can and should play on predominately White college campuses, because the extent to which African American faculty can provide support and mentoring to the African American students determine the ease of their transition to the predominantly White college environment. Chickering (1981) states that it is faculty that make the difference in the education of students...even for those who are not necessarily in the faculty members classes. But as Flemming (1984) posits in her publication, today more African American students are enrolled in white colleges and universities than the "Historical Black Colleges". Flemming (1984) also suggests that, despite generally superior facilities and resources found in White colleges and universities, the culture of the White college/university may be less supportive of African

American students' personal, social and cognitive development than at Historical Black Colleges. This gives pause for concern and raises the question, with the majority of African American students attending White colleges and universities, how can these students get the kind of support necessary to be successful in obtaining a wholistic college education? What needs to be developed, then, are models of educational support systems and counseling modalities that can, and indeed will, impact on colleges and universities, to insure the best education possible for African American students on White campuses. The models and or support systems addressed in this paper will describe the roles of both White and African American faculty which should shed light on how they might more appropriately respond to the "special" needs of African American students, if in fact these supports are not available because of the institution's historical orientation and ethos.

Shlessinger (1983) stated in one of his many speeches:

> However carefully any ruling class may design education as a system of control, education cannot escape becoming an agency of social emancipation as well. There is nothing more dangerous to an existing order than to teach people how to read and think. Education, because it enables young men and women to read and think for themselves has functioned historically as the primary mechanism of opportunity in American Life.

If white institutions fail to provide academic and social support to African American students, African American faculty must organize to move these institutions to appropriate levels of accountability. If this doesn't occur, African American faculty remain part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

Historical Overview

Two of the ways that White institutions responded to African American students enrolling in large numbers as a result of the Civil Rights movement was, (1) the development of Afro-centric courses in history, literature and to some extent, far reaching courses, such as Black psychology and Black sociology. (2) Concomitantly African American social clubs were developed. Most of

these clubs were entitled, Organization of Black Students, (O.B.S.) or The Black Student Union.

In regard to this new curriculum, Ballard (1973: pp. 104-105) suggests that,

> "DuBois and Woodson had long searched," unsuccessfully for an educational curriculum and an institutional setting for the "special" education of Black youth. No Black Institution in the south had been able to provide its own specialized curriculum as had, for example, the network of Catholic colleges across the country. The thrust for a "relevant" Black education came, therefore, from students on predominantly white campuses, since it was precisely there that the contradictions between White and Black America were most intense. The white American university has always been preoccupied with western civilization and has refused, over decades, to deal seriously with the question of Black people in this country. How, one might ask, could Professors Glazer, Banfield and Wilson, in view of their writing on urban affairs, help a Black student at Harvard who wanted to study the Black conditions in cities."

It should be noted that Ballard wrote his work in 1973, the questions that now need to be raised are how many and how often do faculty of African descent sit on curriculum committees in present day academe? Further, how many courses relating to the experiences of people of

African descent have reached the curriculum especially as part of the colleges' majors? and, are White students required to take these courses? Perhaps, most important, as considered by Peterson et al. (1978: pp. 204-205), "What is the societal context in which Black students exist...Black nationalism or integration". We believe that Black nationalism carries a double helix and that segregation within the white institution by Black students and especially Black faculty is self-defeating. We also believe that a wide participation, on the part of Black students in colleges or universities, is necessary for success beyond college; that Black students must learn how to present their view of academic material from an Afrocentric and Eurocentric perspective. Therefore, not only should Afrocentricism be developed by the Black faculty and administrators of African descent but also Eurocentric curriculum must be reshaped for emerging truths within the canons and infused into the college or university curriculum. Harvard's early model of diversity, although limited in regard to numbers of diverse students, was based on the notion that students learn a great deal from each

other within the college experience. Indeed, although some would label the above institution elitist, esteemed educators Bowen and Bok (1998) present compelling evidence that diversity works in American higher education in the nations, "selected schools". Their research show that for the past 30 years, these selective universities have had race-sensitive admission policies, which incidentally, in the late nineties have come under fire in both the political arena and the courts. They contend that by almost every measure, race sensitive admission policies work. The students who are admitted because of race sensitive admissions policies are succeeding in school, and are going on to successful careers while playing an active role in civic life at disproportionately high rates. Moreover, they claim, as we have suggested above, that students of all races are benefiting educationally from diversity on campuses? While the students, White and Black, admitted to attend selective schools are reasonably well prepared, colleges and universities, in "lesser" academic and educational tiers around the nation admit White and Black students who may be in need of extensive remediation and thus are usually

less familiar with intellectual content. These students are more inclined to embrace nationalistic dogma and lean towards segregated student life opportunities. For the African American students in this population, it may be very important for Black faculty to help them to see themselves as part of the world order and an integral part of society rather than allowing them to function at the edge. For example, new discoveries about DNA clearly change ideas about human evolution, positions Africa as the birthplace of civilization and Africans as the first humans in the evolutionary chain. Thus, what is being suggested as a way faculty of African descent can be helpful to students is to move Afrocentric ideas and information into the mainstream college curriculum and help students understand that their Afrocentricism should motivate them to compete at the highest intellectual levels possible.

Reshaping Eurocentric curriculum is indeed a daunting task, but must be tried and can be done. At our campus we have developed several opportunities to discuss debate challenge and make the case for infusing the college curriculum with Afrocentric ideas. Although not as much

as we would like, we have put in place ethnic studies courses that all students must take as well as African American studies courses that are part of majors and cross listed in an interdisciplinary fashion with courses for selective majors in the curriculum. Further, based on how our course offerings are scheduled, many White students take African American studies courses. We also have Better Teaching Seminars where White, faculty of African descent, Latino and other diverse faculty members discuss teaching our multi cultural student body: According to appropriate sensibilities. Finally, we have a focus groups looking specifically at the relationship of Black-Jewish relations and how each impact on the college community in general and the student population in particular.

Allen, Epps and Haniff (1991) support the kind of programs listed above. They describe desegregated schools as having the ability to practice heterogeneous grouping at both the school-and classroom levels, equal status conditions, emphasis on academic effectiveness and a flattening of the performance differentials. In addition, Allen et al. (1991) advise that desegregated institutions

make explicit and directed discussion regarding such issues as leadership style, teacher training, discipline, parent involvement, individualized instruction and curriculum development. They are attuned to issues of cultural diversity and learning style differences. Further, this type of institution thus provides the kind of environment that can both maximize academic attainment while simultaneously providing the kind of desegregated educational experience that will prepare students for a pluralistic society. Indeed, this is the kind of education that American college students need.

Social Support

The second issue for which a model is required has to do with the social life of students of African descent on White campuses. According to Allen, Epps Haniff (1991: pp. 146-147) "Social support is designed as the degree to which a person's basic social needs are gratified through interaction with others...basic social approval, belonging, identity, and security (Kaplan et al., 1977)." In our view, it is necessary for Black students to have these needs met in

order to make the necessary adjustments to the white campus environment. However we tend to think that this is an area often neglected by faculty in general as faculty lean more towards those activities that help secure their tenure and promotion. There have been models within higher education in the past relating to student activities as part of the wholistic learning experience that students should be exposed to during college. It may be suggested that this model is one that all faculty can embrace and therefore move faculty, away from a narrow tenure and promotion model to a more expanded one. The criteria for tenure and promotion have always been excellent teaching, publishing and service to the college community. We need to separate service to the college community into two distinct categories, as service to the college community generally means faculty committee work. We should continue committee work within the context of service to the college community but add another category; "service to the student community" as a separate category. This model links faculty and students in a productive way and provides for students, "learned faculty leadership" regarding their

activities and where this faculty leadership has been exceptional and/or noteworthy, a recommendation from the Provost and Vice President for Student Affairs should be factored into the faculty member's portfolio for tenure and/or promotion. As Flemming (1984) points out, perhaps most important, the student must have (1) opportunities for friendship which should not be confined to students peers but also include teacher, staff members and professional counselors; (2) opportunities to participate in the life of the campus; they must feel some connections to current goings on, and (3) they must have the opportunity to feel some sense of progress and success in their academic pursuits.

Clearly this means that the organizing that takes place on White campuses by the professional members of the community of African descent must consider all of these issues in some structured format. It is this structural format that is most important for the welfare of students of African descent, because this structural modality comes in the form of a visible African American organization which can provide advocacy in the broadest educational, cultural and socio-political format. The Black Faculty and Staff

organization or the Organization of African people on a White college campus is a must. Such an organization encompassing faculty, administrators and support staff at every level has at its disposal, a wide and in-depth view of the campus and information of monumental scope that can benefit all members of the community of African people, especially students. We suggest that there is no better way to participate in the academic landscape. The academy, is viewed by many as the most intricate and complex organization in our society. Its length of time to become permanent (tenure), the difficult process to be promoted and contrived negotiation of the canons to advance curriculum, is just the tip of the iceberg, when one considers providing support and nurture for students of African descent. Indeed, such an organization can support staff and junior faculty as a group of particular importance for providing sustenance to Black students. This Junior faculty and staff group generally constitute the largest professional group on campuses yet, they are the most vulnerable.

As Astin (1985) posits, the principal advantage of the student involvement theory over traditional pedagogical approaches is that it directs attention away from subject matter and technique and toward the motivation and behavior of the student. Student involvement views student time and energy as institutional resources. Given this view, all institutional polices and practices, those relating to academic as well as non academic, can be evaluated in terms of the degree to which they increase or reduce student involvement. Similarly, all higher education practitioners – counselors and student personnel workers as well as faculty members and administrators, can assess their own activities in terms of their success in encouraging students to become more involved in the college experience.

There are several ways to develop an organizational structure. Generally different levels of staffing dictate the model, e.g., Faculty organization, Staff Organization, Student Organization and sometimes a few administrators come together. But too often they do this separately from each other. Having experienced the sixties, the seventies,

the eighties and the nineties, it can be stated that the more African Americans are separated out, the more social, economic and political ground they lose. They can no longer stand on ceremony based on credential. It can be further suggested that with the exception of students, all members of the community of African descent administrators, faculty and staff meet and develop a campus organization that can respond to faculty staff and student needs within the organizational structure as well as the needs of African students. Such an organization can also relate to the social and political organizations within the city that the college or university resides so that mutual support, information flow and learned expertise can be transmitted back and forth. As Cross (1984: pp. 25-26) advises in his insightful book, "If power is found in consensus, and if power building is consensus building, it follows that power disappears whenever consensus dissipates." It has often been stated by the leaders of groups confronted with adversity that if we don't stick together, we will all hang separately. There is wisdom in these words.

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